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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004347

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SUBJECT: RECONCILIATION MINISTER DISCUSSES CONFERENCE,
CHALLENGES, AND RECENT TRAVELS

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: On November 23 the Ambassador met Akram al-Hakim, Minister of State for National Dialogue and Reconciliation. They discussed obstacles to the reconciliation process, the recent travels of a delegation from the National Reconciliation Commission, the recently-postponed political parties conference and the need for a third-party broker to monitor agreements and compromises. Al-Hakim noted that mistrust inhibits both the GOI and Iraqi leaders outside the political process. The Ambassador stated that reconciliation is key to Iraq's future and offered his support to the Ministry. On November 24 the Ministry informed emboffs that a preparatory political parties conference will occur November 28 in Baghdad and a larger conference including Iraqi leaders outside of the political process will take place mid-December. End Summary.

Defining the Ministry, Defining its Challenges

[¶2.](#) (C) Minister of State for National Dialogue and Reconciliation Akram al-Hakim (SCIRI) began the meeting stating that his is "an important ministry with difficult circumstances and limited options." He explained that the Ministry coordinates with the High Commission for National Reconciliation to accomplish three goals. First, he said, there are the conferences which include the upcoming political parties conference. Second, the Ministry works to improve relations with political parties and brings the various communities closer together. Finally, al-Hakim concluded, the Ministry is actively working in Diyala province trying to ease increasing sectarian tensions.

[¶3.](#) (C) When asked about problems the Ministry faces, al-Hakim responded that as a State Ministry they do not have a budget. Material support is always needed, he said, although this is an easy problem to solve. The more pressing challenge, according to al-Hakim, is that GOI officials and party bloc leaders hesitate to make decisions especially as it relates to concessions or compromises needed to move the reconciliation process forward.

[¶4.](#) (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question concerning the PM's commitment to reconciliation, al-Hakim asserted that the PM supports his reconciliation "project," but he faces conflicting pressures. While the PM believes in taking action, his advisors, his cabinet and the political parties have resisted taking action, effectively inhibiting him. The PM hesitates because he fears reaction to decisions that do not have broad support, al-Hakim continued. Encouraging the political blocs to take action and increasing the "diversity within the PM's staff" are the only things that can help the situation, al-Hakim concluded.

Encouraging Participation Within the Political Process

15. (C) The Minister explained that he recently sent a delegation consisting of his advisor, Saad Yousif al-Muttalibi, and three Reconciliation Commission members to Cairo, Amman and the UAE to meet with Iraqi groups outside of the political process. The delegation's purpose was to ensure broader participation at the political parties conference, to include groups who have indicated a new willingness to join the political process. The meetings were good, al-Muttalibi said, and allowed these groups to share "their true feelings." Their concerns, he said, include federalism and the need to delay its implementation, de-Baathification, militias and sharing Iraq's natural resources.

16. (C) Al-Muttalibi stated that the Ministry and the Commission are trying to create "a new reality" which includes compromises and concessions from both the current political leaders and those groups outside the political process. There remains, however, significant mistrust between both sides and unwillingness from either side to make concessions. When asked whether representatives from these groups, including former members of the Baath party, would attend the political parties conference, the Minister and al-Muttalibi agreed that it would be possible as long as sufficient notice was given. Al-Hakim noted that former Baathists could attend the conference as long as they did not attend as Baath party representatives.

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Political Parties Conference: Delayed Again

17. (C) Turning to the political parties conference, the Ambassador asked when it will occur, noting that it has been postponed three times. Al-Hakim responded that part of the problem is that the conference's success depends on people outside of Iraq attending. In order for them to attend, they need sufficient notice. The Minister said that he met with the PM on November 22 and set a date for next Tuesday, November 28. The PM, however, will leave for Jordan, and it had been hoped that the PM would actively participate at the conference. Furthermore, al-Hakim continued, holding the conference next Tuesday would not allow enough time for Iraqis in Amman and the UAE to attend. When asked about having the conference following the PM's trip to Amman, al-Hakim replied that he will be accompanying SCIRI chairman and head of the Shia coalition, Abdulaziz al-Hakim, on his trip to the United States and will therefore not be available.

18. (C) On November 24, al-Muttalibi informed poloff that a preparatory conference will occur November 28 in Baghdad. Approximately 100 Council of Representatives (CoR) members, GOI officials, and representatives from political parties not currently in CoR will be invited. A larger political parties conference including groups outside of Iraq and groups not involved in the political process will occur in mid-December when Minister al-Hakim returns from his trip.

Building Trust Through a Third-Party Mediator

19. (C) Commenting on the mistrust which exists between those outside of the political process and GOI officials and political party leaders, the Ambassador asked whether a third party could intervene to act as a mediator or peace-broker. Al-Hakim responded enthusiastically, although he seemed uncertain as to who could perform this role. Commenting on the benefits of having a third-party who could monitor

compromises and agreements, al-Hakim noted that the Syrian FM offered to host a reconciliation conference and serve as a mediator. It is "a bit early" for that, al-Hakim said. (Note: In a separate conversation with poloff, al-Muttalibi said that the Ministry is hoping Sweden could serve as a potential mediator. He stated that the Ministry hopes to receive a delegation from Sweden in the coming days and will propose this idea. End Note).
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